

Hugh H. Benson: *Clitophon's Challenge: Dialectic in Plato's Meno, Phaedo, and Republic*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. x + 318. £44.49 (hb). ISBN 9780199324835

Clitophon asks what advice Socrates can give to those who have already recognized the importance of pursuing virtue. Benson proposes to take Clitophon's challenge seriously: if Socrates identifies virtue with a kind of knowledge, presumably knowledge of good and evil, and does not possess that virtue-knowledge himself, how can he recommend that others acquire it? Revolving around such a methodological question, this monograph attempts to show that Plato's answer lies in the method of hypothesis and clarifies how the method is actually employed in the *Meno*, *Phaedo* and *Republic*.

Following the introductory chapter, where the above goal is described with some consideration of the developmentalist/unitarian dispute, the next three chapters (2 to 4) are devoted to establishing the preparatory point that virtue-knowledge is *not* expected to be attained by elenchus or recollection. Drawing on the conclusions of his earlier work (that elenchus is not intended to prove the truth of each individual proposition), Benson argues that the only heuristic method Socrates adopts in the elenctic dialogues is to find out and learn from someone who knows. But this approach ends up with failure to find such a person (chapter 2). Attention is then turned to the *Meno*, where Socrates is made to face a similar methodological challenge: Meno's paradox of inquiry. The recollection theory successfully wards off the paradox by securing the possibility of learning but makes no contribution to clarifying the actual learning process (chapter 3). The remaining approach to acquiring virtue-knowledge is thus said to be the method of hypothesis. Here Benson carefully considers and rejects the view that the method is only a makeshift strategy, which might be indicated by the fact that it is introduced as an alternative to defining what virtue is in the *Meno* and to Socrates' first voyage in the *Phaedo* (chapter 4).

The analysis of the method of hypothesis itself starts in chapter 5, which roughly reconstructs the procedural elements described in *Meno* 86e6–87b2 and *Phaedo* 100a3–8 and 101d1–e3. And the ensuing chapters are intended to fill out the details by looking at how that structured process is actually applied to the arguments at *Meno* 87b–100b (chapter 6), *Phaedo* 100b–101c (chapter 7) and, unexpectedly, *Republic* 471c–502c (chapter 8), all of which aim at clarifying Plato's description of dialectic in Books 6 and 7 of the *Republic* (chapter 9). As you can see from this summary, Benson's stance is that Plato has the same procedure in mind when employing the method in those three central dialogues. According to Benson, the method consists of the proof and confirmation stages. The proof stage reduces the original

question to another and posits the most compelling answer to that reduced question as a hypothesis ([Pa]), from which the answer to the original question is shown to be inferred ([Pb]). The confirmation stage verifies the truth of that hypothesis by checking its *hormêthenta*, which Benson translates as ‘the things that start out from it’ ([Ca]), and by positing a higher hypothesis in accordance with the procedure of the proof stage ([Cb]), and continuing this until reaching something adequate.

Benson interprets the applications of the method as follows. In the *Meno* Socrates first reduces the original question whether virtue is teachable to the question whether it is knowledge ([Pa] and [Pb], 87b–d). To confirm the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge, he first posits the higher and adequate hypothesis that virtue is good, from which both the reduced and original questions are answered ([Cb], 87d–89c). The other part of the confirmation stage, Benson argues, is then carried out at 89c–96d, where the *hormêthenta* of the hypothesis—taken loosely, encompassing not only the consequence that there are teachers of virtue but the empirical observation that there are not—are shown to be in discord with each other ([Ca]). Those conflicting *hormêthenta* are said to indicate incomplete use of the method (chapter 6). The next chapter, about *Phaedo* 100b–101c, argues that the original question what the cause of generation and destruction is is reduced to the question whether Forms exist; the positive answer to the latter, namely that Forms exist, is then posited as a hypothesis ([Pa]), from which the answer to the original question is obtained, namely that Forms are the cause in question ([Pb]). Benson says that there is no explicit application of the confirmation stage in the *Phaedo* (chapter 7). In contrast, a full application of the method is said to be found at *Republic* 471c–502c, where the main question is whether Kallipolis is possible. According to Benson, again, this original question is reduced to the question whether philosophy and political power coincide. The positive answer to the latter question is posited as a hypothesis ([Pa]), from which the original question is shown to be answered ([Pb], 473b–e). Then the hypothesis is attempted to be confirmed by formulating the higher and adequate hypothesis that philosophy is knowledge of Forms ([Cb], 474c–487a), and by checking the *hormêthenta* of the initial hypothesis, namely that philosophers are virtuous and beneficial, and that they are vicious and useless ([Ca], 487b–502c). Unlike the *Meno*, however, the *Republic* does not end with an aporetic outcome because the latter of the *hormêthenta* is shown to come from a false belief about philosophy itself (chapter 8). The last chapter argues that the dialectical method described in books 6 and 7 of the *Republic* is the correct use of the method of hypothesis, by which the upward path of the confirmation stage is pursued until grasping the Form of the Good ([Cb]) and that grasp is verified based on only those genuine or essential

hormêthenta that are in fact caused by its component Forms ([Ca]). These two elements constitute the main differences to mathematical inquiries, which incorrectly employ the same method of hypothesis, starting with an inadequate starting point and verifying it based on contingent or artificial *hormêthenta* as well (chapter 9).

Benson's treatment is lucid and meticulous and includes many helpful observations of interpretative issues related to Plato's method of hypothesis. Here I cannot do justice to his detailed arguments about such fiercely disputed problems as, for instance, which hypotheses are posited in the *Meno* and in the *Phaedo*, what the *hormêthenta* of a hypothesis are, and so on. So I limit discussion to one remarkable point which is only briefly defended in the book but seems to me crucial to the plausibility of his view that the same methodological structure is found in the three dialogues. Benson claims that at *Phaedo* 101d3–8 Plato does not have in mind the specific temporary order of verifying a hypothesis ([Ca]) and positing a higher hypothesis ([Cb]). This leads to his original interpretation that those two procedures are actually applied in the *Meno* (chapter 6) and *Republic* (chapter 8) in the way that [Cb] precedes [Ca], as we saw above. His reason for the optional order in question seems to be only that *echoito* at *Phaedo* 101d4 should be taken as 'hold on to' rather than as 'attack' (see pp. 141–4, especially n. 84). Even if this is granted, however, it is not clear why the former interpretation of *echoito* supports his claim that 'anyone holding on to the hypothesis itself should be ignored until both procedures (in no particular order) have been performed'. This is because, whether *echoito* may be translated as 'accept' or 'attack', the situation envisaged here is, as Benson would agree, that one attempts to confirm one's hypothesis, although some commentators suppose that checking the *hormêthenta* of a hypothesis means examining the reasoning between that hypothesis and its conclusion. As long as [Ca] is taken as confirming a hypothesis, it does not make much sense to posit a higher hypothesis and try to explain why the original hypothesis is the case *before* one gets to some extent confident in its truth by checking its *hormêthenta*. For if the hypothesis one posits leads to absurdity, it must be *ipso facto* rejected, irrespective of its being supported by a higher hypothesis. Moreover, I believe that the precedence of [Ca] over [Cb] is important in understanding the upward path in the *Republic*, where dialecticians are expected to use hypotheses as stepping stones (511b4–5); this is methodologically meaningful only if one possesses independent grounds for endorsing those hypotheses beforehand. Benson might respond that the actual applications in the *Meno* and *Republic* require us to read the description at *Phaedo* 101d3–8 in the way he suggests. But the *Phaedo* passage seems to me, on the contrary, to suggest that the confirmation stage ([Ca] and [Cb]) is not applied there.

Whether or not you agree with the overall interpretation, there is no doubt that this is one of the most important books on Plato's method of hypothesis. I heartily recommend that those who are working on this subject study the book closely.

Naoya Iwata
(University of Oxford)